

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Claims 1-6 (Cancelled).

7. (Currently Amended) A method of forming, under a reduced pressure, a thin-film circuit by applying a high-frequency power to an electrode for supporting a substrate to be subjected to plasma processing, said method comprising:

before performing said plasma processing on the substrate, simultaneously subjecting a top surface and a bottom surface of the substrate to a charge-neutralization plasma in gas mainly composed of an inert gas while the substrate is separated from the electrode, so that electric charges on the substrate are neutralized and so that the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate are made substantially equal in potential.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein the inert gas comprises at least one gas selected from a group including Ar gas, He gas, N₂ gas, H₂ gas, and vaporized H₂O gas.

9. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to charge-neutralization plasma comprises holding the substrate above the electrode by lifting pins so as to separate the substrate from the electrode during said simultaneous subjecting of the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to charge-neutralization plasma.

10. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 9, further comprising lowering the lifting pins so as to lower the substrate towards the electrode during said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to charge-neutralization plasma, while still holding the substrate above the electrode so as to separate the substrate from the electrode.

11. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to charge-neutralization plasma comprises applying the high-frequency power to the electrode to generate the charge-neutralization plasma at a level such that the substrate is not etched and such that a film is not formed on the substrate.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, further comprising, after said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to a charge-neutralization plasma, stopping a flow of the inert gas into a chamber in which said plasma processing is to be performed, while introducing a process gas into the chamber.

13. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein a level of the high-frequency power applied to the electrode during said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to a charge-neutralization plasma is no more than $1/3$ a level of the high-frequency power applied to the electrode during said plasma processing.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, wherein said simultaneously subjecting the top surface and the bottom surface of the substrate to charge-neutralization plasma and said plasma processing are performed in the same chamber.